

**ISSUE BRIEF*****Legislative Training
Project*****CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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The Legislative Training Project is designed to educate policymakers and raise awareness of issues relating to children and families through workshops, orientations and briefings with legislators and their staff and the development and distribution of the Child Legislative Manual.

BACKGROUND

Most legislative bodies resolve issues on a "reaction" basis. Because of the nature of the political and elective process, solutions to long-term problems are often put on the back burner or forgotten while daily crisis receives the energy and attention of the public, press and elected government officials. Too often, these crisis or "current" issues have brewed for a considerable period of weeks, months, or years before receiving needed attention.

Legislation enacted in haste is often executed in a type of informational vacuum. State legislators, lacking sufficient staff resources and in-house expertise, have traditionally been dependent on outside sources for the basic information necessary to make policy decisions.. This problem becomes even more acute given California's current situation of term limits and fiscal constraints.

EFFECTS OF PROPOSITION 140

By initiating term limits and reducing legislative staff, Proposition 140 (1990) dramatically changed California's political structure. First, it severely reduced California's legislative budget. As a result, the Senate Office of Research, the Assembly Office of Research, the Legislative Analyst's Office and the Auditor 'General's Offices have been reduced to a fraction of their prior strength. The staff members of long-term legislators who had become well respected experts in health, child development, education and

many of the more complex policy areas, left these legislative offices. With the budget reductions, it was more cost effective to retain generalists than specialists in children and family issues,

In addition, Proposition 140 also reduced the terms legislators could serve. The Senate is now limited to two four year terms and the Assembly to three two year terms. As a result, there will be a continuous change of legislators, and with them legislative staff. By 1995, it is anticipated that almost half of all legislators will be new to the system. Children's advocates have long believed that the first two or three years of a new legislator's term was lost for children and family issues because these issues are both complex and controversial. Legislators and their staff need continuous and gradual education about the service--needs and options for children and families.

Finally, even without the budget problems, analysts within the legislative process have become concerned about the ability of state legislators to resolve the increasingly complex child and family problems with which they are continually faced-perinatal substance abuse, health care for mothers and children, lead problems in school sites and old housing, and a host of other similarly complicated issues. Many of these issues are outside the realm of their experience.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

In response to this policy void, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation awarded the Child Development Programs Advisory Committee a grant in 1992 to conduct the Legislative Training Project. The overall goal of the Legislative Training Project is to improve legislative planning and decision making in California through a collaborative process.

LEGISLATIVE TRAINING PROJECT

Reasonable and sound policy decisions based on accurate and timely information on children and families will encourage, and to some extent, drive quality systemic change. The approach requires looking at the overall health and safety of children, instead of the temporary solutions of the day.

The Advisory Committee sought to meet the goal of the Legislative Training Project through three objectives:

- ***To coordinate orientation and training of new legislators, legislative staff and other policymakers on basic information regarding children and families.***

The Advisory Committee accomplished this objective by providing short, concise orientation workshops to newly elected state legislators and their staff providing them with a Child Legislative Manual summarizing historical legislation, describing current policies and services and including a directory of resources within each specific policy area. In addition, the Advisory Committee provided brief, informative quarterly workshops at the State Capitol on current issues to all legislators and other policymakers and staff.

- ***To provide individual legislators, committees and staff of state policy makers with a source of readily available independent information that summarizes policy options or new research 'on children and families.***

Responding to the research and data needs, the Advisory Committee provides monthly Issue Briefs and fact sheets on current issues regarding children and families to legislators and their staff for inclusion in the Child Legislative Manual. In addition, the Advisory Committee also prepares and distributes Summaries of current government, foundation, university and other public and private reports on issues that affect children and families. Finally, the Advisory Committee established' an Electronic

Bulletin Board that allows access to Advisory Committee minutes, announcements, agendas, issue briefs, report summaries and legislative bulletins regarding child care and development issues.

- ***To facilitate a forum of interaction between lawmakers and regulators, practitioners and parents,, academic researchers and specialists, so that each may become more familiar with the philosophies, workings and needs of effective policy development.***

To accomplish this objective, the Advisory Committee conducts public forums on specific issues of importance in connection with their monthly meetings in the State Capitol, schedules ad hoc think tanks or invitational work groups, calling together multidisciplinary specialists to look at particularly complex issues and to search for solutions and hosts semiannual conferences to continue state and local collaboration and to assist public and private planners in developing strategies that are appropriate for their communities, and that together will form a comprehensive system.

'For further information on the Legislative Training Project, please contact Erica Benson-Hallock or Terri Gill, Project Analysts, at (916) 653-3725. Electronic Bulletin Board number (916) 654-1224